

Mona Lisa's Famous Romance Exploded by Her Eyebrows?

Latest Misfortune of the World's Most Celebrated Picture, Its Love Story Declared Pure Invention and Itself No Portrait of Its Painter's Sweetheart

THE romance of "Mona Lisa," which has inspired poets and story writers for three centuries, appears to have been completely exploded by a French connoisseur and art critic.

According to this expert the famous picture does not represent a woman called "Mona Lisa"; it does not represent the sweetheart of the painter Da Vinci or any woman of his age, but it is an idealized picture of Saint Anne, the mother of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

If Da Vinci ever painted a picture of a woman called "Mona Lisa," the expert argues that it is the work of the artist entitled "Portrait of an Unknown Woman," now in the Uffizi Gallery at Florence.

The connoisseur who has made these discoveries is Andre Charles Coppler, who writes in "Les Arts," one of the leading European publications devoted to the fine arts.

Everybody knows, of course, the old romance that has grown around Da Vinci's picture. It is said that it was a portrait of the "Mona Lisa" or "Lady Lisa," whose maiden name was Gherardini and who was the wife of a gentleman named Francesco del Giocondo, at the time the picture was painted. The romance tells us that the painter adored his interesting wife, that he spent four years in painting her picture, that he kept her surrounded with lute players and entertainers in order to excite the enigmatical smile that makes her picture so fascinating.

This romance has been taken up and embroidered upon by many writers of genius. It has been used by Theophile Gautier and Arsene Houssaye, in France, and by Walter Pater, in England. When the great picture was stolen from the Louvre two years ago all the literature that had been woven around it was recalled and discussed all over the world. When it was discovered and returned a few weeks ago there was universal rejoicing that a work of such unequalled beauty and interest had been restored.

The cold, clear eye of M. Coppler, the expert, saw through the immense structure of romance that had been built around the "Mona Lisa." He found that the original authority for the statement that it was a portrait of Mona Lisa del Giocondo was Giorgio Vasari, the old Italian writer on art. Theophile Gautier and all the other romancers had picked up a brief statement in Vasari and built all their structure of romance upon it.

M. Coppler turned to this statement of Vasari and found that he described the woman of the picture as having "rather thick eyebrows and humid eyes" among other features. Then M. Coppler turned to the picture called "Mona Lisa" and found that it did not have any eyebrows at all and certainly did not have "humid eyes."

These are the exact words of Vasari.

He began for Francesco del Giocondo a portrait of Mona Lisa, his wife, and left it unfinished after having worked on it for four years. He who could learn to what point art can imitate nature may satisfy himself easily by examining this head, in which Leonardo has represented details with extreme fineness.

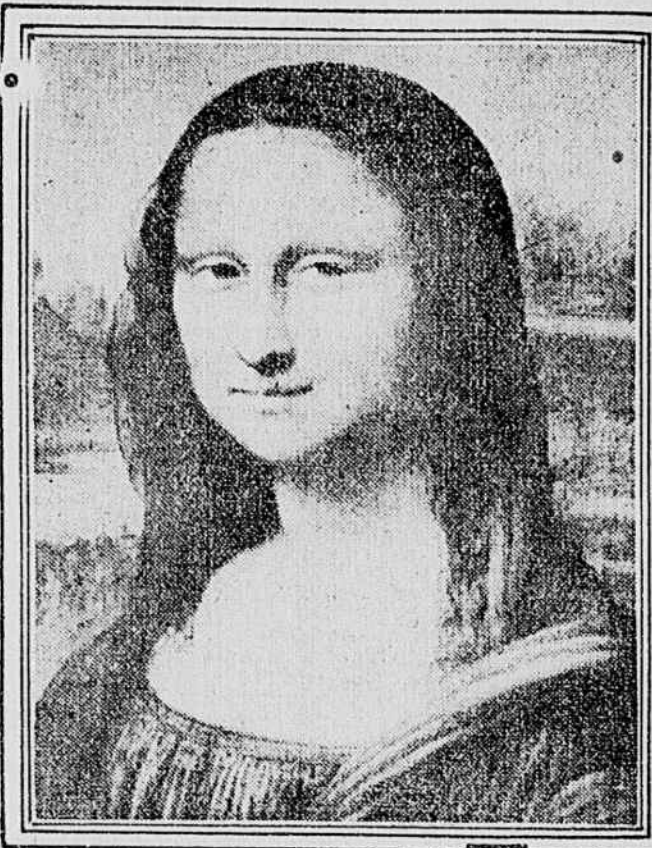
"The eyes have that brilliancy that humanity, which we see in life, they are surrounded with ruddy tints and darkened with perfect verity."

"The lashes which shade them are executed with extreme delicacy; the eyebrows, their insertion in the flesh, their rather pronounced thickness, their curve following the pore

of the skin, could not be rendered in a more natural manner. The nose, with its pink and delicate nostrils, is indeed that of a living person. The mouth, its opening, its extremities joined by the vermilion of the lips to the carnation of the cheeks—that is no mere coloring, it is flesh indeed. In the hollow of the bosom the attentive observer can surmise the beating of the pulse; in short we must admit that the face is of a skill to make one tremble and to cause the cleverest artist in the world to shrink from attempting to reproduce it.

"The gifted Leonardo to arrive at such perfection employed this means among others. While the beautiful Mona Lisa was posing, he had always near her singers, musicians and jesters in order to keep her in a gentle gaiety and avoid that aspect

Vasari's Statement on Which the Romance About "Mona Lisa" Was Based Spoke of Her Eyebrows. Note That This Picture Has No Eyebrows. It Is Said to Represent St. Anne.



If the Romance About "Mona Lisa" Had Any Basis in Fact It Must Have Referred to This Unnamed Portrait of a Woman with Eyebrows, Now at Florence.

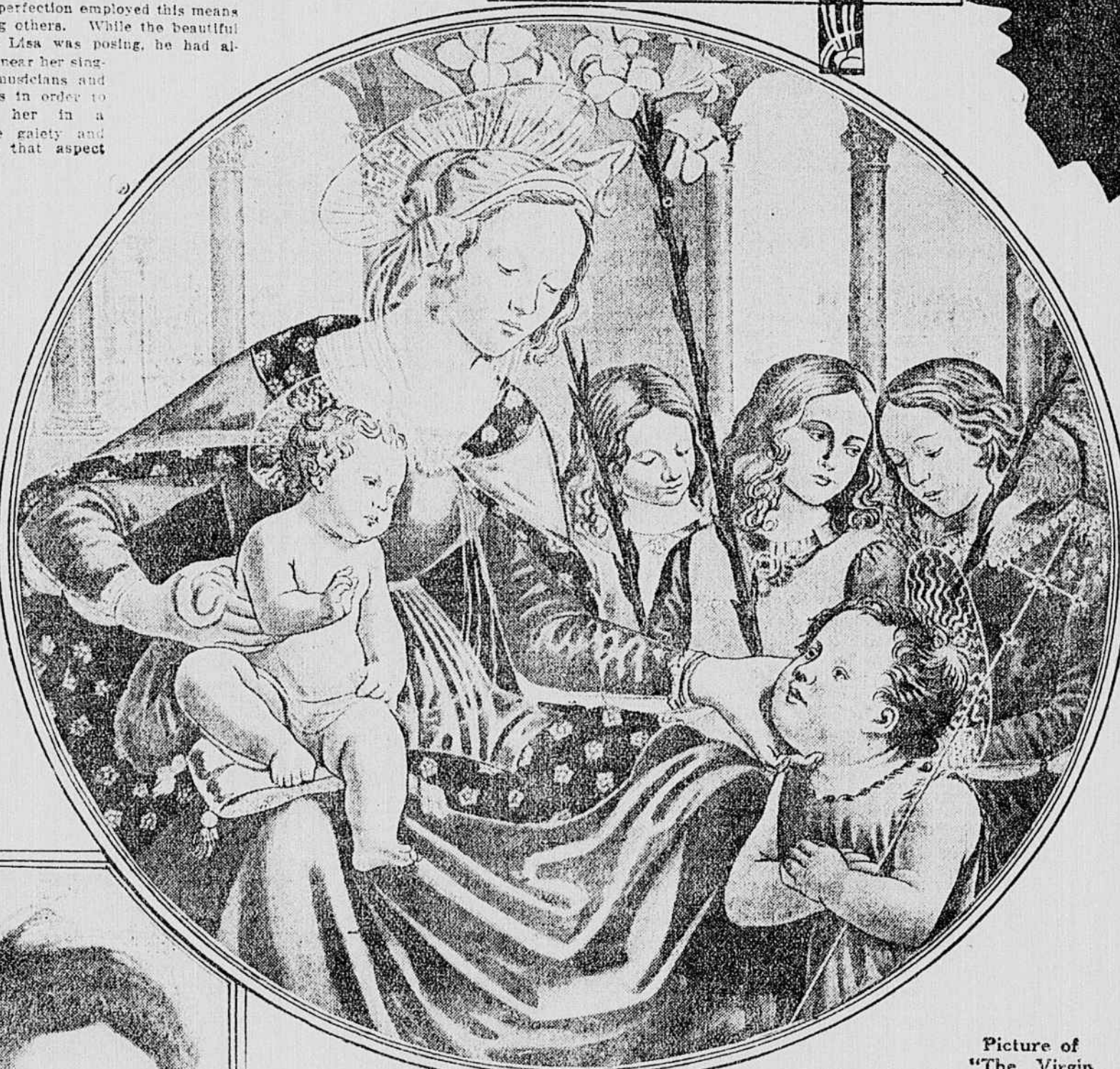
M. Coppler turned to Leonardo's religious paintings and made a most interesting discovery. He found that the face of the "Mona Lisa" bears a close resemblance to the face in Leonardo's picture of Saint Anne, also in the Louvre. There is the same enigmatical smile, not so masterfully treated as that in the "Mona Lisa," the same absence of eyebrows, the same peculiar cast of features. M. Coppler found the same type of face in many other religious paintings by Leonardo, and he found it in men as well as in women saints.

In M. Coppler's opinion, then, the so-called "Mona Lisa" is a picture of St. Anne, and should be labelled as such. It is not the portrait of any person. It may have had a model originally, but in this form it is the idealized saintly type of face which the artist has given in many religious pictures, notably in his admirable "Madonna of the Rocks."

There remains one more point which will completely dissipate the romance of the "Mona Lisa." Did Vasari have any authentic picture by

Leonardo in mind when he spoke of a woman with "eyebrows" and "humid eyes?" It appears highly probable that he had in mind the small picture of an "Unknown Woman," now in the Uffizi Gallery in Florence. Vasari must have seen this picture. He certainly represents a woman with eyebrows and with what may be called "humid eyes." It is known that this was a picture of Leonardo's youth, and that it was not painted at the time when in the fullness of his powers and in the service of Giuliano de Medici is said to have painted the "Mona Lisa." The picture is a comparatively uninspired one as compared with the so-called "Mona Lisa." The wife of Francesco del Giocondo is not believed to have been in Florence in Leonardo's youth. There is no ground for associating any romance with this picture. In any case, it would be necessary to invent an entirely new one.

M. Coppler supports his argument with a wealth of references, with carefully verified dates and with extracts from authentic records.



Picture of "The Virgin and Child" by Mainardi, Which Illustrates the Practice Among Florentine Painters in Leonardo's Day of Representing the Most Sainly or Divine Persons Without Eyebrows.

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is finished. Then, again, Leonardo could not have painted Ginevra d'Amerigo Bent, as Vasari states, for she died in 1473, before he painted anything. He says nothing of the beautiful hands of the "Mona Lisa," nor of the wonderful landscape behind her, as he would surely have done if he had seen the picture.

Destroying Vasari's credibility destroyed the sole foundation for the romance, for it proved that Vasari had never seen the "Mona Lisa" when he wrote about it. Every fact that M. Coppler subsequently investigated tended to disprove the idea that the picture could represent Del Giocondo's wife.

Leonardo was only in Florence a few months at the period the picture was said to have been painted, and during all this time he was under the orders of an imperious prince, Giuliano de Medici, who would not have left him time to dally with the portrait of a sweetheart to the accompaniment of slow music. The artist was evidently entirely occupied with the commands of Giuliano de Medici.

The only authentic record concerning the picture is by Leonardo

himself, who states that it was executed by the commands of Giuliano de Medici, without saying whom it represents.

Giuliano de Medici was exiled from Florence in 1494 and returned in 1512, which is the earliest date when he could have taken Leonardo into his service. Leonardo remained in Florence only a few months after this time, as Don Giuliano took him away to Rome and thence to other cities.

Leonardo went to France in 1516, taking the "Mona Lisa" with him, and died there. Vasari was born in 1557, and never went to France, so that he could never have seen the picture except at the age of four, which would hardly enable him to write his enthusiastic description of it.

The absence of eyebrows in the picture is most significant. It was the custom of the ladies of rank in Florence, in Leonardo's time, to remove their eyebrows completely with great pain and trouble, because it was believed that this fashion added to their charm of expression and increased their resemblance to the statues of classic antiquity. The

picture then represents a lady of rank. Now, the wife of Francesco del Giocondo was not of high rank, and she was a Neapolitan and would probably not have followed the Florentine custom of removing the eyebrows.

Now, it is noticeable that Leonardo and the other Florentine artists of his time in their religious pictures always paint the very saintly or divine personages without eyebrows, while those of lesser importance are shown with the plebeian eyebrows. We see this very well in Mainardi's beautiful picture of "The Virgin and Child," now in the Louvre, in which the Virgin and Holy Child are scrupulously devoid of eyebrows, while some of the attendant children possess them. These artists naively imagined that persons of great importance in heaven should be made to look like the most noble and fashionable ladies of the day.

The "Mona Lisa" then must be a lady of high rank or a very great saint. There is no record of any other portrait painted by him at this time, since we have seen that the statement of Vasari cannot be regarded as an authentic record.

Using a Picture Puzzle to Keep Out Feeble-Minded Aliens

A PICTURE puzzle is being used successfully by the immigration authorities as a test for defective aliens at Ellis Island.

It is known as the Healy picture puzzle. The complete picture shows a horse and colt. Seven pieces are removed from this and the alien is required to put them into position. The puzzle is very simple, as the object to be attained requires.

It seems to be established that a normal alien will do the puzzle within two minutes.

At a time when Congress is talking about imposing a literary test on immigrants, this puzzle is worth considering. A test requiring aliens to read and write may exclude many persons of great natural intelligence. Everybody wishes to exclude idiots from this country. The picture puzzle, it is claimed, will shut out the feeble-minded, but let in the intelligent but unlettered alien.

Dr. M. K. Gwyn, of the United States Public Health Service, describes in the Medical Record how he uses the puzzle:

"The picture with the cut out parts lying by its side are shown to the alien, and he is told that this is a picture which can be completed by filling in the vacant spaces with the pieces lying by the side of the picture. He is also told that the pieces will all go in easily when placed in the right position—that it is not necessary to use force. The parts are so cut as to give a clue to the correct position by shape and color and reference to animals in the picture. If successful the time is recorded in minutes and seconds. A failure is recorded as 'F,' followed by the time within ten minutes during which the alien works at the test before deciding that he cannot do it.

"Normal aliens over sixteen years

of age will usually solve the picture within two minutes; defectives, on the other hand, require more than five minutes, if they are successful at all. The main portion of the picture gives comparatively little trouble except to the idiot and imbecile, who here fail utterly. The fitting of the two component triangles into the large triangle takes ordinarily twice as much time as the rest of the picture. It is here that the defective shows up so glaringly with his absurd mistakes. The fact that the two right triangles are the component parts of the isosceles triangle is not noticed at all until by a process of elimination by fitting the rest they are the only two pieces left on the board. At this point I have frequently seen the alien lift up the board and look underneath to see if there were some parts missing. Almost invariably this is left to the last, although during the fitting of the rest of the picture he may pick up one of the triangles only to drop it immediately in favor of some other part of the picture.

"Although no single test is sufficient for a diagnosis, as a general thing it will be found that immigrants who take more than three minutes to correctly solve this puzzle should be gone into further before deciding that they are normal. It has been found in practice that an alien who solves the picture puzzle in two minutes or less will usually solve the Healy frame and Fernald test (two other tests used for aliens) equally as well, but I have not been able so far to determine the lower age limit at which success is attainable for the picture puzzle, as most of my cases have been over sixteen years of age. But the few instances in which I had an opportunity of testing the picture puzzle in nine, ten and twelve-year-olds they have failed to solve the triangle although successful with the rest of the picture."